

The Confessions of a German Deserter

Written by a Prussian Officer Who Participated in the Ravaging and Pillaging of Belgium

(Continued from last week)
CHAPTER III.

Four of us had formed a close friendship. We had promised to keep together and help one another in every danger. So we often visited the homes of citizens together and did our best to quiet the harassed people we met and talk them out of fear of our forces. Without exception we found these people friendly and quick to feel confidence in us when they learned that we really were their friends. If we wrote on their doors with chalk, "Here live good, honest people, please spare them," their gratitude knew no bounds. If so much had blood existed and if so many things which led to the military execution of innumerable Belgians, it was because of the mistrust systematically nourished on the part of the German officers.

That night we marched on after being joined by a 21-centimeter mortar battery of the foot artillery regiment No. 9 recently arrived. Not only were we to act as an auxiliary for this battery, but we were also expected to help bring these immense cannon into action. These guns were in two sections, each transported on a wagon pulled by six horses. These horses, the only ones used by foot artillery, are supposed to be the finest and most powerful in the German army.

Yet these animals were seldom up to expectations, so that it was a common thing to detail from 70 to 80 men to assist in transporting these mortars, and long heavy ropes were carried for this purpose. This happened most frequently whenever the guns had to be taken off a highway and brought into a firing position.

Soon we arrived at the city of Bertrix. We found many houses at the right and left of us burning brightly. They had been set afire, we learned, because persons in them had fired on passing soldiers. In front of one of these houses was a half-burned man and woman with their fifteen or sixteen-year-old son. All were covered with straw. A little way farther on, three more civilians were lying dead in the same street.

As we were marching we suddenly received an order to surround a certain house at the left of us. Our captain declared that a shot fired from that house had killed a soldier. None of us had heard anything, however. The house from which the shot was alleged to have been fired was soon surrounded and hand grenades thrown into it through the windows. In a minute all the rooms were aflame. The air pressure from the exploding grenades was so great that doors in the house flew from their hinges and the walls of several rooms were crushed.

Almost at the same time five civilians ran into the streets with raised hands. They were seized at once and led before the officers, who constituted themselves immediately into a court-martial. Ten minutes later sentence had been executed, and five men lay on the ground with eyes bandaged, riddled with bullets.

In each case six of our men were always called upon to execute one man's sentence. I am sorry to say that I was one of the thirty called upon at this occasion. The condemned man who it was our duty to shoot was about forty years old, tall and straight. He never blinked as the bandage was put on. He was led to the garden of the house near by and his back placed to the house. After our captain said to us that it was our duty to aim true and end the tragedy quickly, we took our positions six paces in front of the condemned man. The sergeant commanding us previously gave us instructions that we were to shoot the condemned men through the breast.

Now we formed into two rows, one behind the other. The order sounded to load and aim and we each put five

cartridges into our rifles. "Prepare to fire!" the men in the first row knelt down and the second row took their places. Our guns were now held so that the barrels were forward and the butts were hip high. "Aim!"—and slowly we aimed, holding our guns tightly with the butts against our shoulders and our fingers on the triggers.

The sergeant paused a half minute and then ordered us to fire. I do not know to this day whether our victim died at once, nor was there ever an opportunity to learn how many of the six bullets found their mark. All day I went around like a man in a trance, reproaching myself bitterly for having acted the part of executioner. For a long time I could not bear to speak about it to my comrades, for I felt guilty, and yet what could we soldiers do other than execute the orders given us?

In the evening we went into camp in an open field, pitching tents and the next day continued our march. The country through which we passed was uninteresting and offered nothing in the way of variety. The few tiny villages through which we passed had all been abandoned, and war.

After a long march, interrupted only by halts and short bivouacs, we approached the large Belgian-French border town of Sully, located on the Belgian side of the border. It was about noon, and as the thunder of cannon constantly grew stronger, which indicated that a new battle was developing, we hoped to be able to remain in the town overnight. About one o'clock we entered and were billeted in a big barn. Most of the soldiers refused to eat from the field kitchens, and requisitioned eggs, chickens, geese and young pigs. Soon everybody was cooking. I am sorry to say that most of those who foraged had refused to pay for what they had taken.

Several soldiers soon arrived with barrels of wine and also many bottles, which were instantly opened and emptied. The obvious result, and soon many noncommissioned officers and men were helplessly drunk. The owner of our barn had possessed three large hogs. One of the drunken noncommissioned officers tried to kill one of these hogs with a dull pocket knife. He had tortured the poor beast almost to death when the animal was mercifully killed by a bullet. A few minutes afterward the officer went to sleep. This was only an example and not the worst, for the inhabitants of the town had to endure much from our men who had become drunk. There were open and secret robberies of gardens, stables and houses here and to restrictions whatever were put on the soldiers. There was no improvement in their general conduct, despite many complaints. One family reported that the French had treated them very well, but that our highly trained soldiers plundered and stole. It was therefore not surprising that the population suffered want and hunger. I often shared my bread with these suffering people. With two comrades, one day, I gave my portion of meat, vegetables and preserves and also a bag of onions to a woman with eight children. Because the iron was missing in our blood, we three were sentenced to extra watch duty for a week for the offense of displaying a love of humanity.

Our leader, Lieutenant of Reserve Elm, declared that such a thing as pity was insanity. He said if the woman had eight children that was her business. Then he concluded by saying with great emphasis: "In war everybody looks out for themselves, even if everything around him perishes."

Another soldier was sentenced to serve 14 days at hard labor. He was bringing bread to a hungry family and had six small loaves in his arms, which he had gathered from among the soldiers. The same lieutenant met him, accompanied by several noncommissioned officers. To the question as to where he was going, he replied that he was on his way to assist a poor family which had actually suffered hunger. The lieutenant at once ordered him to return the bread to his company. Then he raged and raged at the soldier, calling him fool, idiot, hottemot, etc. But the soldier nevertheless did not obey and when the lieutenant thundered a second command to halt, the soldier turned around and threw the bread before the lieutenant's feet. Then he said quietly, "I do not wish anybody any harm, but if you and your autocratic family, and the whole German nation had to endure what the poor Belgians are obliged to suffer, it would be a bitter but just lesson."

This man was sentenced to serve 14 days for talking back to his superior officer. It surprised us all that he was let off so easily.

But bitterness in the ranks grew, and at last the many hard punishments that were pronounced created so much feeling that the soldiers refused to be

any of their comrades.

We left Sully the next morning and one hour later crossed the Franco-Belgian border. Here again we were ordered to give three cheers as we did when our troops first crossed Germany into Belgium. At noon we arrived at Viller-Au-Court. We remained in the village until evening and were permitted to go about without restrictions. In the afternoon nine men of the poor-looking houses mostly destroyed. Long trains of fugitives passed us continually. These people were as a rule those who had escaped when the French army retreated and were returning now to find their homes destroyed by the rough hand of our company. We were greeted for assaulting a woman but were soon released.

At this time there was a great scarcity of tobacco among our soldiers and I knew that a mark or more was paid for a cigarette whenever one was offered for sale. Here, in Viller-Au-Court, there was but one government tobacco stall. I have seen how men were forced by noncommissioned officers at the point of guns to give up their entire supply of tobacco for worthless requisition papers. These "gentlemen" later sold their tobacco at half a mark for small packets.

Toward evening we marched off and brought the hunters to a new position, from where the enemy's defenses on the Meuse could be bombarded. After a short march we encountered and fought a French army northeast of Donchery. Only the enemy's rear guard was on our side of the Meuse. To it was given the duty of covering the crossing of the main body of the French armies over the Meuse, which was done near Donchery.

The few bridges left standing were not sufficient for the enemy to cross as speedily as he should have. As a result there developed in Donchery a terrible fight. The French made an enormous effort. There was a terrible slaughter as men fought against men. It was one of the most fearful battles I have ever witnessed. No one knew afterwards how many had been killed. Sometimes crosses were then erected on the battlefield and revealed men hurrying one another frothing at the mouth.

Without any headgear, unkempt hair, uniforms open or mostly torn, it was disgusting, hitting, scratching and plunging like wild beasts for life or death. Everybody fought for his life. There was no quarter. Only meaning and gasping could be heard.

Each man thought only of his own life, of death or of his home. Old memories raced through the mind, pursuing one another feverishly and yet men grew wilder, for they now battled a new enemy—exhaustion.

But there could not yet be any let-up. Again and again there is nothing to do but strike, stab, bite, fighting without guns or other weapons except those provided by nature for life or death.

The exertion becomes more superhuman. You bite and you are a victor. But victor only for a second, for the next antagonist is already upon you. He has just killed one of your comrades. You suddenly remember that you still have a dagger. After a hasty search you find it in its regular place. One, two, three and it sinks to the hilt in the breast of your enemy. On, on, where there are new enemies. You suddenly see your next antagonist before you. He is after your life. He bites, stabs, scratches, to get you down, to pierce your heart with his dagger and again you use yours. Thank God he lies on the ground; you are saved. But stop! you must have that dagger back. You pull it from the breast of your late enemy. A stream of warm blood shoots from the open wound in your face. Human blood, warm human blood. You shudder, terrified only for a few seconds, for there is another adversary. It is again necessary for you to defend yourself. Again and again the murder commences anew. Always, and always again, through the whole night.

At last, toward four o'clock in the morning, the French retired across the Meuse with the Germans storming after them. When the bridge was full of German soldiers, it was blown up by the French and hundreds of Germans found their death in the Meuse.

To be Continued

ARIZONA MEN TO GO

MONDAY, AUGUST 25

PHOENIX, Aug. 12.—Entrainment orders for the contingent of registrars who are called to leave for Camp Pike, Little Rock, Ark., the latter part of this month were sent to ten counties yesterday by Colonel Charles W. Harris, adjutant general. The men from Maricopa, Cochise, Gila, Graham, Greenlee, Mohave and Pima counties will leave on Monday, August 16.

Those from Apache, Coconino and Navajo counties will entrain on Tuesday, August 27. No reports have been received yet from Yavapai, Yuma and

TEMPE PLACES SURPLUS

FUND TO NATION'S CREDIT

TEMPE, Ariz., Aug. 16.—The town of Tempe has placed its surplus treasury account of \$2500 to the credit of the nation, by deposit for four months or more with the Pacific coast regional bank.

JUDGMENT RENDERED

IN FAVOR OF WIDOWS

PIMA, Ariz., Aug. 16.—Monday, in the Superior court of this county, the widows of the three Graham county officers, Sheriff McBride, Under Sheriff Martin Kempton and Deputy Sheriff Kane Wooten who were killed by John and Tom Powers and Tom Sizewors when they attempted to arrest the latter as draft evaders, were given judgment against the Powers boys.

The three widows were suing for damages as follows: Mrs. McBride \$20,000, Mrs. Kempton, \$20,000 and Mrs. Wooten, \$20,000. When suit was started, in order to attach the property, it was necessary to file a bond in an amount of double the amount sued for. Mrs. Kempton was the only one of the widows financially able to make the bond, and not being able to make a bond of \$40,000, she voluntarily reduced her claim to \$20,000 and made bond for \$40,000.

There was no appearance on the part of the defense in court, consequently judgment was rendered.

Attorneys E. L. Spriggs and Lee Stratton represented the plaintiffs.

It is estimated that the Powers mining property in the Gallura mountains, the scene of the shooting is worth \$100,000. It is said that the senior Powers, who was killed in the battle with the sheriff's force, and the two Powers boys were, some time ago, offered \$100,000 for the property and the only reason why the deal was not made, it is said, was because the prospective buyer would not take the money up to their cabin in the hills and count it out in dollars and cents.

John and Tom Powers, the two defendants in this case, own a one-fourth interest in the property. The balance of the property belongs to the estate of Jeff Powers, father of the boys, who was killed in the fight.

SAYS SHORT LINE IS

NOT YET PASSABLE

PHOENIX, Aug. 11.—Several reports of a short cut to California have reached the chamber of commerce. When the well known road map maker, Harry Locke, was in the city a few days ago the road committee of the chamber of commerce asked Harry to go over the road and make a report on it. Locke was leaving for California in a few days and agreed to make the run over this so-called new route. Word has just been received from Locke in which he says:

"The road from Bisbee (New Bill Williams fork, at Cactus Queen mine) to Yucca is not in shape to be traveled until some contemplated work is done. There are bad, rock grades, sand washes and the road is only fit for bootleggers to use."

"The line is feasible and will become the main road to Los Angeles soon, but no one should undertake to go over it until much work is done."

MARICOPA'S SHERIFF

BAGS TWO HIGHWAYMEN

PHOENIX, Aug. 16.—Men known in Phoenix and Mesa as Happy Black and Fred St. Clair, convicted at Flagstaff on two separate charges of highway robbery, and given indeterminate sentences from 10 to 20 years, were lodged in the Maricopa county jail last night by Sheriff Dickinson of Coconino county, who is taking them to the prison at Florence.

Black and St. Clair, according to Sheriff Wilky's records, stole a motorcycle in Phoenix and a high power, second-hand car which they traded for a new Dori car at Mesa, later trading the new Dori for a second-hand Chandler.

After they left Phoenix they went to Flagstaff, held up a car owner at that place and forced him to sign a bill of sale for his car, and then put him out of the car. Later they held up another motorist and robbed him of money and guns. They were captured at Williams.

ARIZONA HAS 85 MURDERS

IN THE PAST 18 MONTHS

PHOENIX, Aug. 11.—A new compilation has been made of county records of murder cases for the past 18 months, complete with the exception of Greenlee county. It has been found that there have been 85 such cases, compared with 36 for the same period before the abolition of capital punishment.

MORE LANDS OPENED TO

ENTRY IN THIS STATE

Under the provisions of a public notice just issued by the Secretary of the Interior approximately 1,000 acres of irrigable lands included in 28 farm units on the Yuma irrigation project Arizona-California, will be opened to entry at Yuma, Arizona, on December 11.

These farms are located in the Yuma valley, now being watered from the Colorado river by the Government canal.

In the event that more than one application is received for a particular tract a hearing will be held to determine the successful entrant.

The reconstruction charge is \$15 per acre. An initial payment of 5 per cent must be made at time of filing water right application, and the balance in 15 annual installments beginning the fifth year after the first installment is made. No interest is charged on deferred payments. In addition to the reconstruction, or the building charge, entrants must pay an annual operation and maintenance charge.

WELL KNOWN OFFICER TAKEN

PRISONER BY THE ENEMY

DOUGLAS, Aug. 11.—In the recent list of prisoners taken by the Germans, the name of Captain Harry M. Brown, of San Diego, appeared. Captain Brown is well known in Douglas for he was stationed here with the Twenty-second infantry for two years. While here he married Miss Ansel Stout, sister of Mrs. Chas. T. Statfield, who was prominent in local society circles.

Mrs. Brown is now in San Diego with her husband's parents, and Mr. and Mrs. Scott are visiting there. A son was born to Captain and Mrs. Brown at Columbus, N. M., shortly before the father left for France.

Captain Brown came to Douglas with the Twenty-second infantry from Texas City, Texas. His home was in San Diego, Cal., and he later transferred to that city from here, and entered the aviation branch of the service.

SOLDIERS RATHER

THAN GOVERNORS

PHOENIX, Aug. 11.—Now that the government has indicated an urgent need of all man power between the ages of 18 and 45 years what will be its effect upon the governorship race in Arizona, for nearly all of the candidates for that office will be available under the new man power program and subject to registration on September 5," said Harry J. Saxon, a prominent cattleman and former member of the lower house (from Santa Cruz county, now in this city) arranging to enter the service of his country.

Continuing Mr. Saxon said: "Naturally candidates for public office express a great desire to serve their country, and now at a time when our nation is facing a period of great stress and needs every available man in military and naval service, rather than public office the question that occurs to the public is 'Will they do it?'"

"The people of our section believe that our country needs soldiers more at this time than it does governors, and will vote accordingly."

MANY BALLOTS

NOT RECEIVED

A good many blank ballots for the primaries and the accompanying instructions sent to voters from Arizona in the military and naval service will not reach their destination.

Return cards have been received from many of the camps and cantonments bringing information to the clerk of the board of supervisors that the addresses of the soldiers are not known. In most cases probably they have been transferred to other points.

ARIZONA POSTMASTER IS

TO ENLIST IN THE NAVY

WINSLOW, Ariz., Aug. 16.—William Dase has resigned as postmaster of Winslow and has enlisted in the navy at Los Angeles. John Gibson has been given temporary appointment to the office. J. W. Brown has been made postmaster at St. Johns, county seat of Apache county, and has resigned as county school superintendent and member of the state board of education.

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